

METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR COOLING STRIP AND WIRE MATERIAL

The present invention relates to a method and to apparatus for cooling strip and wire material.

In the manufacture of strip and wire material, the material is normally annealed after being finally rolled or drawn respectively. In the case of stainless steel, a typical annealing temperature is 900-1200°C and the product is annealed continuously after being worked. This follows with controlled cooling of the product to a typical temperature of 20-50°C beneath the oxidation temperature.

In normal operation, the wire or strip speed may be about 1 m/s. Because the cooling process will necessarily take a given amount of time to carry out, it is necessary that the path along which the cooling process takes place is relatively long.

According to earlier techniques, the cooling path is essentially straight, among other things because the annealed material is extremely sensitive to plastic deformation and therewith easily damaged when passing through curved cooling paths. In turn, this means that the building which houses the cooling path must be very long, for instance in the order of 10 metres or more. Moreover, when cooling wire or strip, it is necessary to handle a long wire rod that is used to thread the product through the cooling path to a coiling plant.

Thus, it is desirable to be able to reduce the length of the cooling path and thereby reduce the space required to accommodate said path, and also to reduce the smallest necessary length of said path required by the wire rod used to lead the product through the furnace and the cooling path and up to the coiling plant. The furnace and the cooling path are joined together.

The present invention provides a solution to both of these problems, by placing between the furnace and the coiling plant a rotatable cooling drum onto which the product is wound as it leaves the furnace and from which said product is unwound for further transportation to the coiling plant. The diameter of the drum is chosen so that the radius of curvature of the product wound onto the drum will exceed the smallest radius of curvature at which plastic deformation will occur and therewith permanently and negatively affect the

mechanical properties of the product. Sufficient cooling of the product can also be achieved, by winding the product a sufficient number of turns around the cooling drum. As will be realized this enables the cooling arrangement to be made substantially shorter in the longitudinal direction and also to reduce the length of the shortest wire rod extension
5 required to thread the product.

The invention also enables the product to be returned to its original uncoiling position immediately upon leaving the cooling drum. This is beneficial primarily from an automatization aspect and also from an efficiency aspect, and will also contribute to a
10 better working environment and simpler process control.

In order to achieve the object of sufficient cooling of the product, it is necessary that a sufficient thermal mass of the product is rolled onto the drum. In other words, it is necessary to choose the number of turns placed around the drum with regard to the desired
15 cooling effect. When more effective cooling is desired, the cooling effect can be enhanced in different ways:

A first way is by increasing the heat exchange between the product and its surrounding atmosphere by force convection.
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Another way is to further enhance the cooling effect by introduction of a separate cooling medium. This cooling medium may, for instance, be water which is delivered to the inside of the drum. The cooling medium will not therefore come into direct contact with the product but will, instead, effect an exchange of thermal energy through the inner wall of
25 the drum. This inner wall may be given a material quality that will suit the cooling requirement and other conditions and demands relevant at that time. Millimetre-thick stainless steel and thick cast iron are examples of such material qualities. The cooling medium can be applied to the inner wall of the drum with the aid of known technology, by connecting an external cooling medium source to a nozzle placed inside the drum, with the
30 aid of a slide coupling. Alternatively, a cooling loop may be fitted on the inside of the drum.

Moreover, it may be beneficial, and necessary, to enclose the cooling product in a shielding atmosphere adapted with respect, for instance, to the carbon potential between

said atmosphere and the product. When a shielding atmosphere is used, it is necessary to enclose the drum in a housing in which said atmosphere will be under an overpressure, by way of suggestion. N₂, H₂ and Ar are examples of shielding atmospheres that can be used.

5 Finally, when the product is not strong enough *per se* to be drawn around the drum by the tensile force generated in the product as it is coiled in the coiling plant, the drum will preferably be motor-driven so as to protect the product from mechanical damage due to excessively high tensile forces in the material.

10 Accordingly, the present invention relates to a method of cooling strip or wire product, in which the product is cooled to a temperature of about 20-50°C after being annealed, and is characterised by winding the product around a cooled drum immediately downstream of an annealing path, such that the product will lie in juxtaposed turns around the drum and unwinding the product from the drum after a number of turns have been applied, in that the
15 said number of turns is such as to cool the product to a desired temperature, and in that the drum is given a diameter that exceeds the diameter at which the product will be mechanically affected by plastic deformation.

The present invention also relates to a cooling arrangement of the kind having the
20 characteristic features set forth in Claim 8.

The present invention will now be described in more detail partly with reference to an exemplifying embodiment thereof shown in the accompanying drawings, in which

Fig. 1 is an overview of an inventive cooling arrangement;

25 Fig. 2 illustrates part of a cooling drum where only one turn of the product is wound around the drum; and

Fig. 3 illustrates part of a cooling drum where the product is wound several turns around the drum.

30 Fig. 1 illustrates a cooling drum 1 according to the invention. The cooling drum is placed in a surrounding housing 2 in which a shielding atmosphere is contained. The shielding atmosphere is under overpressure in the housing 2, so as to maintain the atmosphere around the drum 1.

The wire or strip product 3 enters the housing 2 at the inlet 4 and is wound through one or more turns around the drum 1 and then leaves the housing 2 at the outlet 5. The product 3 is annealed at the inlet 4 and has a high temperature at this point. The product 3 is cooled at the outlet 5 and has a temperature which is much closer to room temperature than at the inlet 4.

The product 3 originally moves from a furnace, not shown in the figure. After having passed through the outlet 5, the product 3 moves to a coiling plant (not shown).

Because the inlet 4 and the outlet 5 can be placed on one and the same side of the housing 2, the product 3 can be passed in and out in mutually opposite directions. This enables the coiling plant to be placed in the proximity of the wire-drawing bench or the rolling mill, therewith providing the aforesaid benefits in the form of improved efficiency and working environment, among other things.

The drum 1 rotates anti-clockwise, in the direction of arrow 6, so that the product 3 will be wound onto the drum 1 subsequent to its passage through the inlet 4, and is wound onto the drum 1 prior to its passage through the outlet 5. The drum 1 is caused to rotate either by the tension force created in the product 3 as it is wound up in the coiling plant, or the drum 1 is motor-driven and caused to rotate at a suitable speed so as to be compatible with the advancement of the product 3 through the arrangement and so as to achieve the desired cooling of the product 3.

Convection of the shielding atmosphere in the housing 2 over the product 3 wound onto the drum 1 can be increased, so as to enhance the cooling effect on the product 3 during its passage through the housing 2. This can be achieved with the aid of fans, , for example.

The cooling effect on the product 3 wound onto the drum 1 can be further enhanced with the aid of an external coolant. This coolant can be used beneficially to cool the inner surface 7 of the drum 1, which surface through the drum wall is in thermal contact with the product 3 wound onto the drum. This enables cooling to be achieved in the absence of direct contact between the coolant and the product 3. The coolant is conveniently applied to the inside 7 of the drum 1 through one or more nozzles 8 situated within the centre of

the drum 1. Delivery of coolant into the drum 1 can be effected in a known manner, for instance with the aid of a slide coupling between the supply means and the drum 1.

The housing 2 includes one or more housing inspection and housing maintenance doors.

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Figs. 2 and 3 illustrate detail sections of the drum 1. These figures illustrate the drum 1 located in the housing 2, and the product 3 wound onto the drum 1.

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As will be seen from Fig. 2, the product 3 can be wound one turn around the drum 1. In other words, the product 3 may simply be curved around the drum 1 so as to exit on the same side of the housing 2 as that through which it entered, without additional turns being wound around the drum 1.

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On the other hand, as shown in Fig. 3, the product 3 can be wound one or more extra turns around the drum 1 prior to said product exiting from the housing 2 on the same side of the housing 2 through which it entered.

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The number of additional turns will preferably be chosen with respect to desired cooling of the product 3 during its residence time in the housing 2. This will, of course, vary with the material of the product 3 and its dimensions, and also in respect of the diameter of the drum 1 and other operating conditions.

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Although the invention has been described above with reference to a number of embodiments thereof, it will be obvious that these embodiments can be modified with respect to product and desired cooling sequences.

Consequently, the present invention shall not be considered to be restricted to the described embodiments, since variations can be made within the scope of the accompanying Claims.